

Moose

Description:

The moose, also called the European elk, is the largest member of the deer family. People love to see these large animals. While there are three subspecies of moose, the Alaskan Yukon, the Canadian, and the Shiras, the Shiras is the only one who resides in Idaho. There are 22,000 moose in Idaho. Idaho is even home to the North American Moose Foundation in Mackay, Idaho. (www.moosefoundation.org)

Is That an Elk??

While some might confuse moose with elk from afar, there is really no mistaking a moose once you know what it looks like. Moose have a rich, dark-colored coat in the summer that can vary from black to dark brown, reddish brown, or grayish brown, depending on the season and the age of the animal. In winter, their coat becomes thicker and sometimes mangy, and dulls in color to a grayish-brown. Moose legs are much lighter in color than their body, often tan or gray. Somewhat similar to a giraffe (without the neck of course), moose legs are extremely long and slender compared to their solid, heavy body.

A moose has large ears and a broad nose which overhangs the muzzle. Moose have an area of loose, hairy skin hanging under the throat known as a "bell" or "dewlap." They also have a short, thick mane on the nape of their short neck. The most striking feature of the moose is the large, palmated (very broad and flat) antlers carried only by the males, which in Idaho, average a spread of 38 inches. An average set of moose antlers may weigh up to 80 pounds and are shed from December to February. To put it in perspective, moose antlers are taller and weigh more than most four year old children!

What is Bigger Than a Moose??

Not much is bigger than a moose. Male moose (bulls) can weigh as much as 7 average adult human men. Baby moose are called calves and weigh 28 to 35 pounds at birth, but within 5 months these little guys can grow to over 300 pounds. Now that's a growth spurt! When fully grown, moose stand about 5- 8 feet at the shoulder with a body length of 8 to 10.5 feet. How can you tell the difference between a male and female moose when the male has shed his antlers? Well, other than the fact that the male moose is bigger than the female; a female moose has a round white patch under her tail.

Water, Anyone?

Moose are usually found throughout willow thickets, spruce and aspen forests, sometimes in sage flats, and most often nearby lakes, ponds, and swamps. Because moose spend so much time nearby water, it is no surprise that this species is an excellent swimmer, and have been known to swim at speeds of up to 6 mph.

Twig-eater

The name moose means "eater of twigs" and was given by the Algonquin, a Native American tribe. They were called twig-eaters because moose eat the roots, bark, and shoots of birch, willow, and aspen. In summer, they feed mostly on water plants such as the water lily and pondweed. They frequently wade into lakes and streams often fully submerging their large heads to reach the roots and stems at the bottom. During the winter they browse on conifers and eat their needle-like leaves. A moose requires an estimated 40 plus pounds of food every day. That's quite a meal!

Big Moose, Big Tracks

Because moose are so large, you might think they would be easy to find. Moose are active throughout the day, but they are really considered "crepuscular" creatures because their peak activity is at dawn and dusk. So if you are out during the day, you might have to work hard to see a moose. One way to find a moose is to look for its tracks. Moose tracks are pointed at the top, not rounded, and are about 5 inches long, and 4 inches wide (pic of moose tracks here). If you can't find any tracks, another strategy is to look for branches without leaves. Usually a moose will "strip" the branches of willows, aspens, and other favorites by first bending the branch over and then pulling it sideways through their mouth. In addition to eating the leaves, they also trim the limbs as high as they can reach. Because moose eat lots of dry plants every day, their scat in winter is very distinctive. The scat looks like compressed sawdust and may be round or elongated, usually smooth, about 1-1.5 inches long. The quantity of droppings is large pile (an average of 128 pellets), as you would expect from such a large animal. Lots of food, lots of scat! In the summer, the droppings are softer, sometimes formless, because of a moist diet caused by eating aquatic plants.

A Moose Would be a Big Meal

The primary natural predators of the moose are the wolf and the grizzly bear. In order to avoid these predators, moose have a great sense smell and sharp hearing. These senses compensate for their poor vision. Despite its size, the moose moves silently through the forest, although if frightened they can crash away at speeds of up to 35 mph. Moose are also prized by human hunters for their antlers.

Reproduction and Offspring

While moose are generally solitary, during breeding season moose congregate together to select a mate. Female moose generally give birth to a single calf (although twins are common with an adequate food supply). The young moose calf resembles the adult, but unlike many members of the deer family, do not have spots or other markings. At three weeks old a calf will already be following its mother and browsing for food. By five months, calves are completely weaned and getting ready to venture out into the world. The young will stay with their mother for about a year until the mother is about to give birth again and she aggressively chases the now year-old moose off. The father does not participate in raising the young. In general, moose are not aggressive towards people. However, the strong bond between a mother and her calf will cause the mother to charge if she feels threatened. Stay away from mothers and their calves to avoid confrontations!



Moose
© Terry Thomas



Footprint
No Map
Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Moose
2. **Scientific Name:** *Alces alces*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: Male (Bull) - 1200 to 1600 lbs.
Weight: Female (Cow) - 800 to 1300 lbs.
Weight: Newborn (Calf) - 28 to 35 lbs.
5. **Diet:** Leaves, twigs, herbaceous plants, water plants and conifers.
6. **Young:** 1, sometimes 2, occasionally 3; called a calf.
7. **Lifespan:** Usually 8-10 years, rarely more than 16 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Artiodactyla
Family: Cervidae
9. **Hunted in Idaho:** Yes
10. **Hunting Link:**

Moose Don't Mind the Cold

Moose are well adapted to harsh winter conditions, allowing them to live successfully in chilly northern climates like Idaho. Occasionally, during a deep winter small herds will form and help pack down the snow so they can move around. Moose live in most of Canada, parts of the U.S. including Alaska, the Rocky Mountains south into Colorado and in the eastern states bordering Canada. Moose also live in Northern Asia and Europe.